Christianity and the Holy Earth

No nation has ever achieved permanent greatness unless this greatness was based on the well-being of the great farmer class, the men who live on the soil; for it is upon their welfare, material and moral, that the welfare of the rest of the nation ultimately rests.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

It will not be doubted that with reference either to individual or national welfare agriculture is of primary importance.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

The vindication of the obvious is often more important than the elucidation of the obscure.

JUSTICE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

I would that the rural youth of today could see agriculture as the great preserver of culture. and the earth as the mother of mankind.

OLIVER EDWIN BAKER

Christianity and the Holy Earth

by

THOMAS JESSE JONES

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR, PHELPS-STOKES FUND

I. The Background

IN VIEW of the ever increasing control of social processes by urban standards and ideals, it is emphatically important to recognize the vital contributions of rural communities, always the primary sources of population and the guardians of the Holy Earth.

Throughout the world the last decade has seen an increasing recognition of the significance of rural people both to government and the Christian enterprise. The Viceroy of India with remarkable insight says, "The (Indian) peasant, now as ever, is the chief source and creator of both her wealth and her greatness and of him it may with truth be said that he is India." Daniel Webster, many years ago, observed, "If there is one lesson of history that is unmistakable, it is that national strength lies very near the soil." If the present population trends in America continue, the degree to which her civilization and culture are Christian will increasingly be determined by the quality of Christian life on our farms. From the point of view of world Christianity, a new rural emphasis becomes imperative.

Dr. John R. Mott, international missionary leader, estimates that whereas nearly nine-tenths of the population of the world are found in the villages and countryside, not over two-tenths of the personalities and money set aside for the establishment of Christianity are devoted to them. The preponderant expenditures are centered on the urban one-tenth.

"By rural reconstruction we have in mind the rebuilding, repairing and reconditioning of rural life so as to bring it into harmony with the sovereign rights of personality and the divine purpose for which man was created." It is being rooted in the great human interests of religion, of health, of home and family life, of agriculture, of economics, of education and recreation.

II. Toward Greater Cooperation

The Foundation is promoting cooperation among missionary boards and other Christian agencies through two important organizations for which it provides an executive secretary and office facilities.

1. The Rural Missions Cooperating Committee is made up of nineteen mission boards in the United States and Canada for the purpose of working together on some of the common problems in the field of rural missions. This committee has among other things actively cooperated in promoting the Cornell School for Missionaries by means of which four weeks of specialized training is provided for furlough missionaries by the New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics. In 1938, eighty missionaries were in attendance, represent-

ing sixteen mission boards and fifteen countries. The Tenth Annual Cornell School for Missionaries will be held in the winter of 1939. On request of this committee, the Iowa State College has agreed to provide a similar short course for missionaries in the Middle West beginning in the winter of 1939.

2. The Christian Rural Fellowship promotes understanding and appreciation of the spiritual and religious values that inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life. It is attempting to rediscover and reinterpret for the present day the spiritual foundations of rural life and high cultural living. The Fellowship is making an important contribution to the religious literature of rural life. Its membership now numbers over four hundred and fifty, representing twenty-seven states in the U.S.A. and seventeen foreign countries. A number of state-wide fellowships have been organized. The Fellowship is sponsored by the Agricultural Missions Foundation, the Town and Country Committee of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee of the Committee of Reference and Counsel of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America.

III. Fellowships for Rural Study and Travel

The Foundation is making a constant effort to bring missionaries, nationals and government officials in mission lands into contact with American resources, especially in the fields of agricultural extension, rural education, rural sociology and economics, the agricultural sciences, home economics and home and family life education. This service is accomplished by fellowship grants for specialized study and observation in these fields and by advice on courses and centers of study. During the past five years the Foundation has granted ninety-five study and travel fellowships totaling over $23,000.00. A special committee of nationally known authorities has recently been appointed to cooperate with mission groups in developing a program of service for home and family life, always the central unit of human welfare and especially among rural people.

IV. Making Available the Experience of Other Lands

Through the literature which the Foundation publishes, the successful experiences and creative experiments in all phases of rural reconstruction in any land are made known to missionaries and others engaged in rural work all over the world. About 1800 missionaries on the Foundation's mailing list receive such information regularly. Two results are evident. It has stimulated interest and new projects on the part of the Christian movement. It has also increased very definitely the sense of fellowship among rural workers around the world in a common objective of a Christian rural civilization and thus is laying a ground work for a far more cooperative enterprise in the future.

V. A Clearing House for Rural Services

Periodic conferences of missionaries, lay people, mission board executives and rural church leaders provide discussion of the problems of rural missions and rural religion in a realistic

and progressive way. The Foundation increasingly serves as the clearing house for agricultural and rural mission enterprises. It acts as a go-between for the rural church interests in the United States and the rural interests of the foreign missionary enterprise. It serves unofficially as the rural department of the International Missionary Council. In so far as it is financially able, it makes grants to significant rural projects. One such project now being aided is centered on an intimate study of farm village life in India in an attempt to lay the foundations for an effective program of agricultural extension.

VI. The Agricultural Missions Foundation

Back of all the services of the Agricultural Missions Foundation is the constant objective of *leavening* thought and action toward greater emphasis on the rural aspects of the world Christian missionary enterprise. To this end the Board of Directors was constituted, one-third from agricultural colleges, one-third from missionary organizations and one-third from laymen known for their deep interests in agriculture and rural life.

Dr. John R. Mott, the Chairman of the Board, is known internationally both for administrative ability and for his world sympathy and vision. Dean Ralph L. Watts, the Vice-chairman, has for many years been Dean of the School of Agriculture of Pennsylvania State College and closely identified with agricultural mission work. Dr. Henry C. Taylor, now Director of the Farm Foundation, Chicago, has had a notable career as an agricultural economist. Dr. Edna Noble White, Director of the Merrill-Palmer School, Detroit, has been actively identified with home economics education and home demonstration work in the United States, and a pioneer in home and family life education. The other directors of the Foundation are equally prepared in their respective fields of influence. The Executive Secretary, Mr. John H. Reisner, is remarkably prepared by education, experience and devoted services to humanity for the responsibilities of his office. As Dean of the University of Nanking College of Agriculture for seventeen years, he is thoroughly oriented in the methods of advancing scientific agriculture and rural life.

The Agricultural Missions Foundation was organized in November 1930. Begun during the depression and carrying on with very limited financial resources, the Foundation has nevertheless accomplished an extraordinary service. The annual budget for educational and administrative services provided by private contributions has never exceeded twelve thousand dollars. There are important opportunities for creative work in rural experimentation and demonstration and in effective cooperative undertakings which await adequate support.

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